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NORWAY.*

By R. T. PRITCHETT, F.S.A.

CHAPTER V.



FOR some days we had been on the tramp and arrived at Indfjord. Thursday, August 20th, 1875, was a sad day at Indfjord. Returned from a long tour through very wild, rough districts where food was not to be obtained nor lodgings to be had, we were settling down for a good night's rest, certainly under difficulties, at the farmhouse of a good bonder, or farmer, named "Ole Erikson Boe," when the gruesome news came of a disaster in the mountains above—a tremendous rock crash, or "steen skreed," had taken place in a spot called Sjolbotten, some three thousand feet above, where there were two "sæters" occupied by two "piges," who had charge of the cows belonging to the good people down the valley. We started off at once. In a more than quiet spot like this, with what a crash such news bursts upon every one! what sympathy it brings out; what interest in the details of the occurrence; what interest in the sympathy of others! What sadness marks each face; how quiet all are, though all are talking, but in subdued voice. We pass on, with a little provision in our wallets, and soon come to some reapers in the valley, working in the fields, with leather aprons for their protection. We started with Halver Jacobsen, the owner of the sæter, who went up, taking a pony and foal, in case the mare's services were required: the foal always runs by the mother. On our sad mission, we could not be otherwise than struck with the joyfulness of the foal; the abounding spirits of the young creature, its caprioles and quirks and capers. Before arriving at the steep part of the ascent we stopped at a small outbuilding close to the farm, the front of the house looking over the Indfjord, through the door, with a grand expanse before one—the morning light shimmering down to the edge of the water, far, far below—all seeming peace and gladness. At the back of the house, between that and the Laave, we found a vastly different scene—pain, grief, and heavy hearts. What a contrast to the brightness on the fjord side—the sunny side that was! The anxious group was in shadow, comparatively speaking; the centre of attraction was a roughly-made stretcher, on which was lying, hardly conscious—pale and agonized and bone-broken—Ingeborg, Erichsdatter, Griseth. Poor girl! she had been brought down some three thousand feet, by a very steep sæter path, hardly any road, jogged and shaken, with one leg broken, ribs crushed, and her face much cut and bruised by the cracking up of the sæter before the overwhelming force which carried it away. Around her were the bonder folk, and one poor old woman whose grief seemed beyond consolation. The autumn was advanced, winter coming quickly on—for the first snow days had begun. She had only one cow to support her; that was at Sjolbotten and was killed, and her only hope of livelihood for the moment swept from her: no kind of cow could be got under £5, and "no siller had she." What a chance for some rich Samaritan to heal a broken heart for the small sum of £5! but as "many a mickle makes a muckle," so, doubtless, would a new cow be bought by the loving hearts and kindly spirits of the good Indfjord-folk. Their kindly love for each other is a lesson to even the most civilised among us. It is very noticeable that small communities care for everybody; large masses notice no individual—only charitable institutions.

But we have not yet commenced the ascent. Through brush-

wood the mare leads; the cheerful foal diverging now and then, in the self-conceit of all young things, fancying they know better than their mothers. It was a steep climb. The mare slipped; but Halve said it was all right, she knew the way. The morning sun was warm, and as soon as we arrived at a kind of ledge looking over the valley and fjord we halted. What a lovely—or rather, what a grand scene it was! Still there was no forgetting our mission; no shaking off its sadness. Our present object, after Ingeborg's arrival, was to go up and see after her companion, Ingrana. Our halt was not for long. We had already taken off our coats, and hung them on a pine-stump. To our surprise, Halve left his there until our return, and said, when we did not, "You can leave anything, as you like, in Gamle Norge." En route, in three hours we had left our last briar and alder behind, and were on the plateau of the High Fjord, and found much "smørgrass," so good for cows. "Smør" being the Norse for butter, will explain the name. Now, for a long time, we tramp over the "botten," carpeted with rich flora; at the end we saw the steen skreede, or landslip. Several bonders were already there, some four or five, and seemed very surprised



The Halt at Griseth.

to see a foreigner coming up with Halve. A few words of explanation, and all was understood; one common object in view, that of helping each other, soon bound us together. Ingrana, naturally, had not been to sleep since the disaster; it is difficult to imagine any Norske pige nervous, but poor Ingrana had been shaken and frightened out of her wits. Her

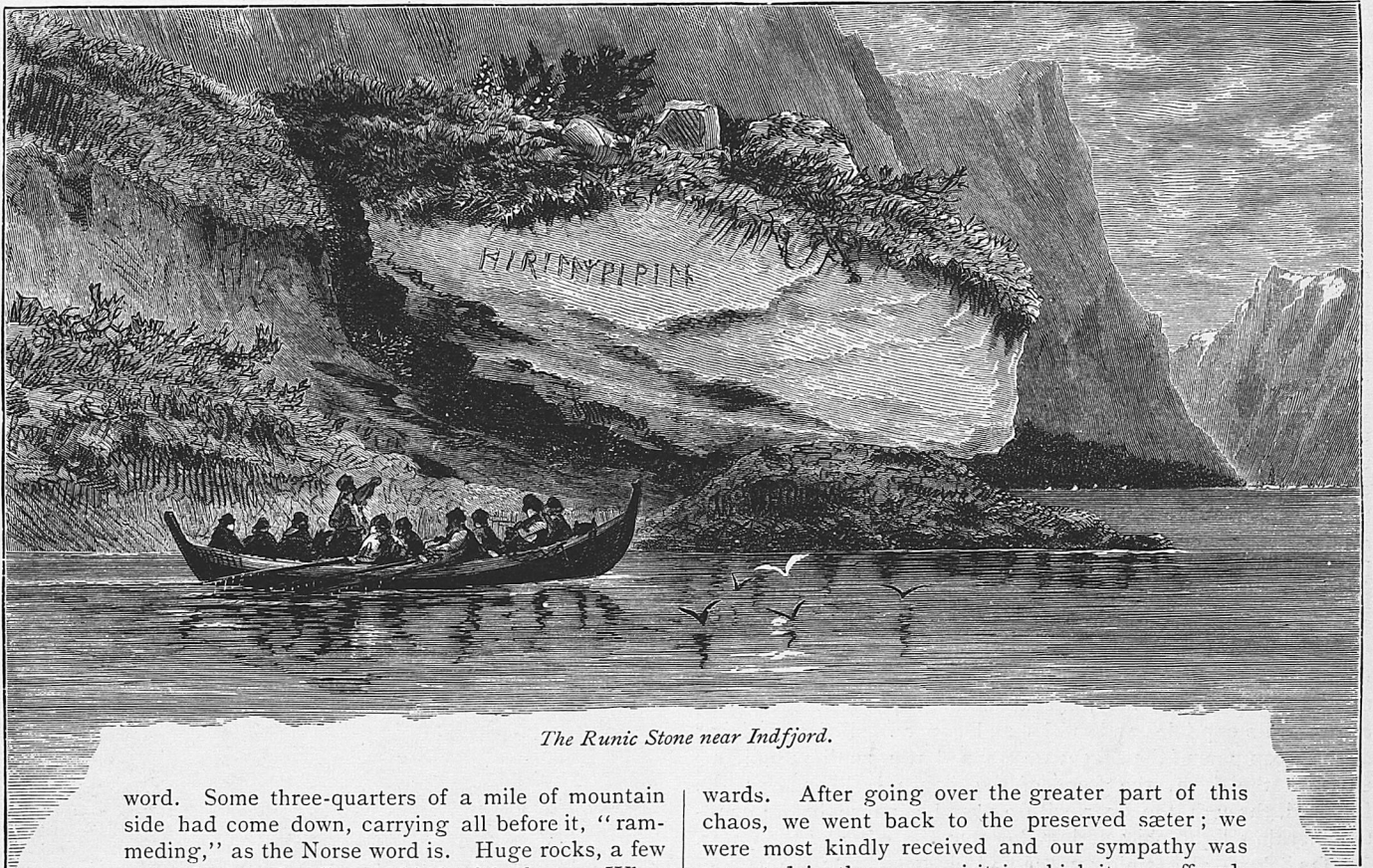
* Continued from page 180.

verbatim description, after a little entreaty and patience on the part of the persuader, ran thus: "Early in the morning, Ingrana was awoke by a heavy rolling sound of thunder, and directly followed a crash. She rushed from her sæter, and coming out of her door, saw Ingeborg's sæter carried away and buried." It is difficult to realise the feelings of this simple-minded girl, living this solitary life for three months. In a moment—a second of time—one taken and the other left. Ten cows also were buried; and Ingrana left alone, to go down this lonely mountain with the sad news, leaving her companion fixed, pinned, and crushed, until she could return with help. We

arrived after three and a half hours' hard ascent; some sour milk that had been left was given us. The Englishman elicited a smile from Ingrana, when, taking the bowl from his lips, his moustache was white with cream. This was hopeful and a good sign.

"The slip was accelerated by a very large waterspout striking the face of the mountain, as amongst the rocks which were brought down was a quantity of sand, and the presence and action of water were palpable, leaving deep pools in many places."

The scene was appalling; a wreck in the wildest sense of the



The Runic Stone near Indfjord.

word. Some three-quarters of a mile of mountain side had come down, carrying all before it, "ram-meding," as the Norse word is. Huge rocks, a few stunted trees, hardly any kind of herbage. What a hurlyburly of desolation! Looking across and over it were seen the placid distant fjord and open sea. What a contrast, the peace of one and turbulence of the other! Still the damage was a known quantity; every year something of the kind happens; a similar convulsion takes place, sometimes with loss of life, sometimes without. The sketch on page 208 was taken from the lower portion, looking up-

wards. After going over the greater part of this chaos, we went back to the preserved sæter; we were most kindly received and our sympathy was accepted in the same spirit in which it was offered. Then we returned. We found Halve's coat quite safe and undisturbed, and after the usual time arrived at the bonder's below, Ole Erikson Boe. A simple repast of good "flad brod" and "bunker;" no meat here. We rested, and early in the morning started for Fiva. During the evening Boe showed me an old Danske Bible, folio size, 1590, with large brass clasps. The good folks wanted me to bring my wife to the funeral, in

MIRINEYPIPI

Inscription on the Runic Stone.

case the poor girl should not survive. In the morning we went down to the shore, as we heard the steamer for Molde was coming in to take Ingeborg to Molde should she be still alive. Life was all but extinct when she was got on board. Ole Fiva and myself started in boat for Veblungnæss, having thanked the good people of Indfjord for their kindly welcome, and they thanking us much for our interest and sympathy, and pressing me to bring my wife to Indfjord, where they wished to welcome her too.

The morning was lovely for boat travel; such peace that

convulsions such as we had witnessed seemed incredible. Still it was no dream, and the inhabitants of Indfjord, the family of Ingeborg, Ingrana, and the poor woman without her solitary cow, all were stern realities.

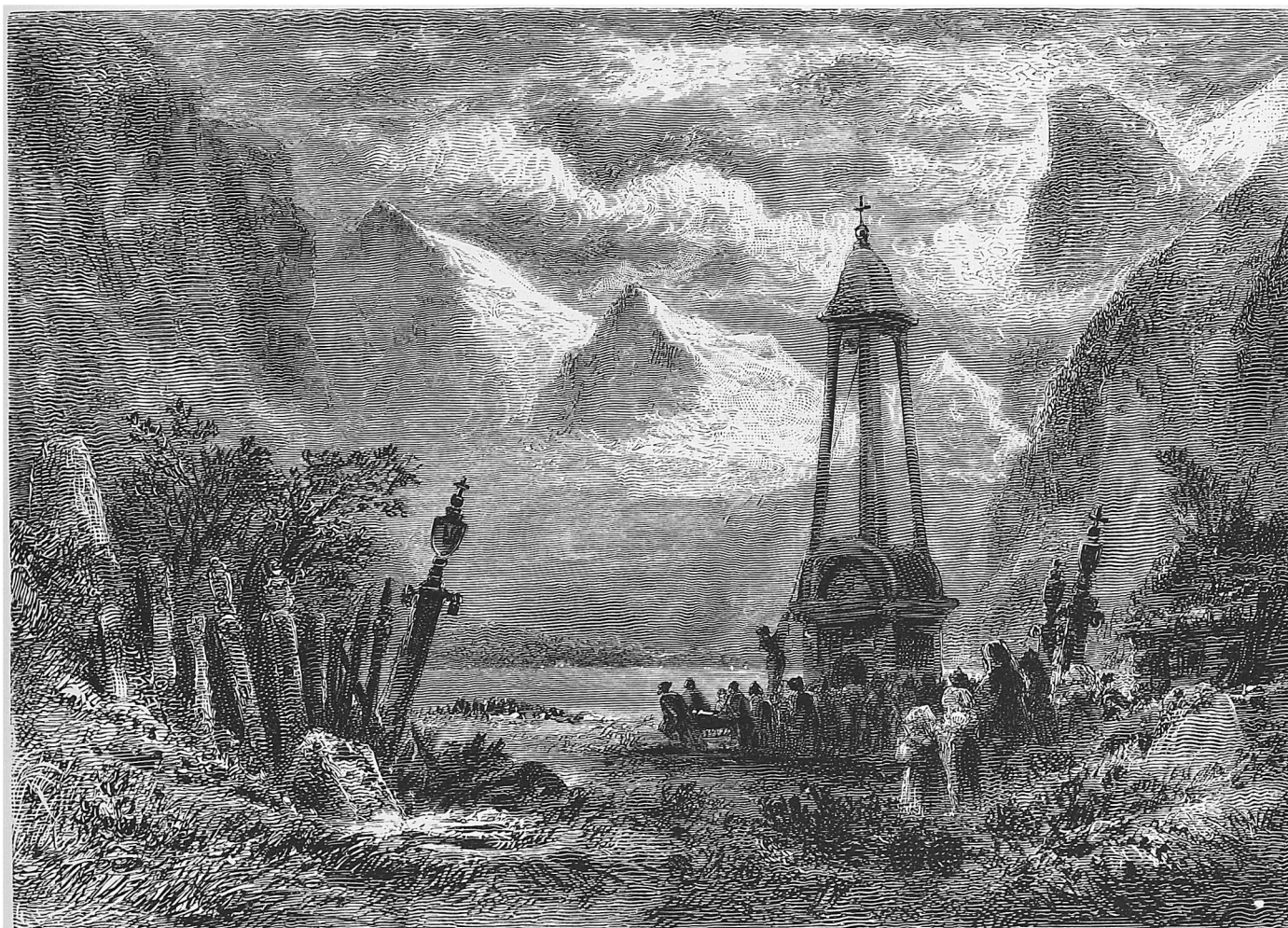
Soon after our return to Fiva we heard that Ingeborg was dead, had been taken back from Molde, and was to be buried in the "gravested," Indfjord, September 2nd, 1875.

Early morn, September 2nd, we started, drove in carioles from Fiva to Veblungnæss; then took boat, having sent on the boat with six oars, self, wife, daughter and Ole Fiva; so we set off

to the funeral at Indfjord. A lovely, peaceful morning it was as we left the landing-place at Veblungnæss; soon the six oars began their sturdy dip as we came under the shadow of the mountains; the dip was strong, as Norwegians only can row, for a long travelling sweep and perfect time. After settling down with our "teena" of provisions—for we were travelling Norskily, and no "Norske" is complete without teena, and well filled—there seemed a sad tone pervading the boat; our mission was one of sympathy for the bereavement of others, with an after-thought of thankfulness that we had been spared in health, sound in body and bone. The melancholy of every one soon after this was broken by a remark from Ola that we should soon see the Runic Steen, half a Norsk mile from Veblungnæss. A lieutenant of Engineers, who was superintending a new bridge, had described this stone to us, and we were eager to see it. At last we came upon it. The boatmen ran alongside, threw water over

it, and I sketched it. In 900 years, "pluvial attrition" alone is sure to make its mark; to say nothing of our energetic friend Neptune's constant stormdrift, storm, and tempest. (The writer would apologize for the term "pluvial attrition," but there are so many long words about just now, what with street advertisements and urban authors.) A general view of the Runic Stone is given on a preceding page: the initial ornament of this chapter was drawn from a plant plucked on the spot. The letters are thirteen in number, and their length about eighteen inches. Twelve feet from the sea level a ledge of rocks runs under low-water mark, projecting some few feet, under this is supposed to be secreted untold wealth.

The translation of these Runic hieroglyphics is, "The Court of Justice," and this was evidently placed in a conspicuous place to guide any who came to the court in old pagan days; for as already stated, Romsdal was one of the last livers of the pagan



The Gravested: Ingeborg's Funeral, Indfjord,

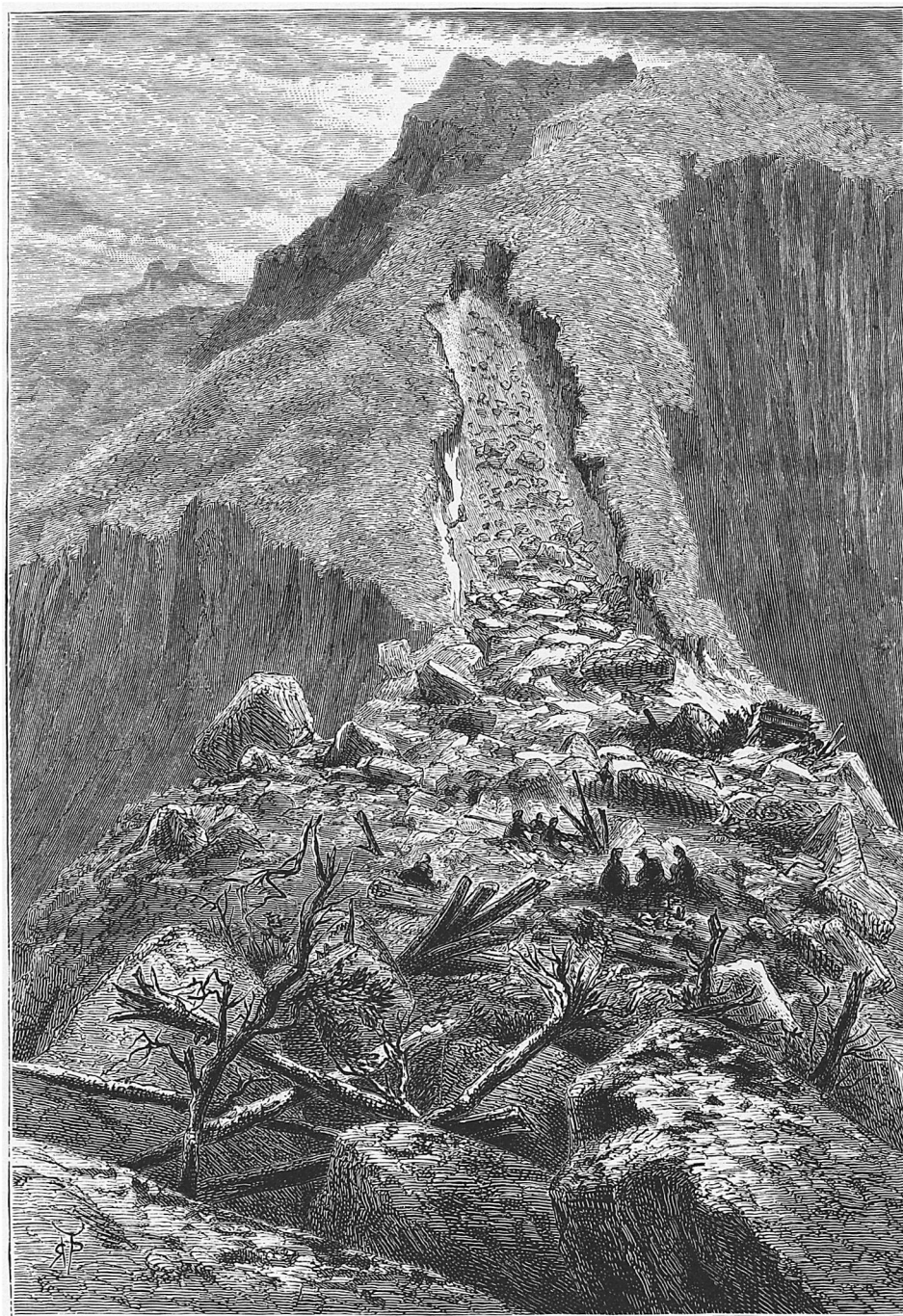
period. Above, high up, close to Sylbotten, was a temple—pagan; but the Court of Justice was held at Devold Romsdal. There was now a regular good settle down for a long pull. Up to this time we have been in shadow, now we round a point, and taking what a landsman would call "first on the left," we go due south down to Indfjord. The sea-water so clear! the quartz rocks reflected à merveille, like the good old chandeliers of our grandfathers after a spring cleaning; the rich sun-lit yellow sea-weed, grander far than ormolu; and here are three herons in repose, water ousels with their snow-white breasts, and now and then sparkles by an old cormorant or diver. As we go down the fjord the snow range at the end of it blocks in everything, the morning mist waiting in the valley for exit, if possible. By this time we near the hamlet, and high above us on the left, on a kind of plateau, we see many figures congregated. They were in front of Erich's house, Griseth being the name of the farm. We soon steered in, and then between two boat-houses, at a rude

pile-driven landing-place, the well-known scrape of keel on shore was heard, and we had safely arrived at Indfjord. By this time Griseth had sent down to meet us and invite us up to the house, but we return message of thanks that we would rather not disturb the family, but await their arrival at the gravested; so with our teena, or carved-wood box, we picked out a spot for lunch and enjoyed some cold reindeer-meat, biscuit, cheese, &c. During the lunch we could see the bonderfolk collecting high up at Griseth, overlooking fjord, and at two o'clock we saw them by the telescope start down the narrow mountain path, the coffin on a little cart, lashed on to prevent it slipping down hill. Soon they were lost in a dip in the wood, then emerged nearer to us. At this time, as we stood at the gravested or graveplace—like our word homestead, homeplace—a man came up and shook hands with us, and then went on to toll the bell, standing on the wall, for here there is no church, only a bell-tower. Soon the procession drew near: first the coffin, black,

lashed on to the hay-cart, and drawn by a beautiful young black Norsk pony; his collar was old carved-wood painted; the bonder driver walking behind the coffin, which bore three wreaths of wild flowers; at a distance behind the coffin came the men, an interval, and then the women sorrowing; then men of the family, many sad hearts, and Ingrana. It was a modest scene indeed, but impressive. When the pony arrived it stopped at the gravest, and hearing the tolling bell, he shied and jibbed, as if regretting what he had done. The coffin was therefore

carried in at once. There being no clergyman, a friend sang a hymn. The coffin was lowered into the grave; the wreaths removed; the ropes were withdrawn. Some one said to Ingrana, "You were lucky to escape." "I could not have been ready," she said; "God wanted me not, and left me a little longer. She was ready," meaning Ingeborg, whom they were burying.

They then sang the second hymn, "Hjemme, Hjemme," as the friend shovelled the earth in, and the heavy thud of the large spadeful boomed like parts of Handel's "Dead March" in



Landslib at Sylbotten, Indfjord.

"Saul." After filling in the grave the wreaths were placed on the newly-risen mound, and the ceremony closed with "Hjemme," the weird sea-birds screamed, and all went away together. Many will recount the story of Ingeborg, Erichsdatter, Griseth.

Before leaving the gravest the grave-boards must be noted, they are so remarkable in form, so quaint, also so Bosphoric. Sometimes a white butterfly is introduced, as typical of the soul. How different to the present association

with the allegory of their transient nothingness! After the funeral we had to pay two or three visits. All the farmers wanted us to visit them; some to tell of sport, some to offer us *aqua vitæ* and stamped cakes like the Dutch *waffles*; and when we arrived back at Ole Erikson Boe's he gave me an old Norske belt as a memento of our visit, and carefully is that memento treasured.

So passed away Ingeborg, Erichsdatter of Griseth, and Ingrana remained waiting her bidding